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The Cubeo Community

361 The Cubeo Indians occupy a string of settlements along a small stretch of the Vaupés River from Uarùa Lake upstream to Uaracapurí and downstream to near the Brazilian border, as well as along several of the Vaupés tributaries, namely the Cuduiarí and the [61] Querarí and Pirabatón. The tribe consists of some 30 or more patrilineal, exogamous sibs[1] that are grouped into three unnamed confederations or phratries of unequal size that are also exogamous. Although the bulk of the Cubeo now live on the smaller streams—the Cuduiarí, in particular, being heavily populated—the broad [614] Vaupés, that joins with the Río Negro to enter the Amazon, is regarded by the Indians as their main stream and as their source. Their 173 leading sibs still live there. Native traditions place the emergence of 614 all the Cubeo sibs at two Vaupés sites, at the turbulent cataracts of 361 Yuruparí and of Uaracapurí. From there the people moved up the nearby tributary streams, the Cuduiarí, the Querarí, and the 173 Pirabatón, a tributary of the Querarí. The traditions record that 361 the first people displaced groups that were already living along [174] these streams and, in this respect, square with historical observations that pressures of enemy Indian tribes, and, lately, the more potent pressures of white colonizers, have been forcing the Indians to leave the main rivers and take shelter in the more 361 distant and constricted feeder streams, or else face physical or cultural 614 extinction. The more timid and the more humble of the sibs have

[1] Following the usage of Lowie (1920, p. 111), "sib" is synonymous with "clan."

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always tended to occupy the narrow headwaters of tributaries while the strong and the top-ranking sibs have favored the large rivers and their mighty cataracts. But while these strong and proud sibs in their exposed positions were able to withstand enemy Indians, they have succumbed more to Colombian and Brazilian missionaries and traders. Thus, the sibs that the Indians refer to as our "head" are now the most acculturated, and the low-ranking sibs the least.

I estimate the population of the Cubeo at under 2,500. This is a crude figure based on a calculation of somewhat under 100 persons per sib on the Cuduiarí, the only river that I had occasion to explore along its entire length. Population was undoubtedly greater in the past. On the Cuduiarí there were 29 main residence sites,[2] each averaging some 30 to 35 people, some only a few minutes by canoe from their nearest neighbors, but for the most part they were separated by at least an hour of steady canoeing. This is high population density for the region. On other rivers in the region, houses are separated by at least half a day's journey by canoe. A severe influenza epidemic swept the region in 1917–18 and took a heavy toll of lives, the Indians say. A number of sibs whose names are still remembered are now extinct. The Colombian government census of 1938, which did not tally tribes, listed some 7,000 Indians for the entire *Comisaría del Vaupés* (Colombia, 1942). This figure, too, is surely an estimate, since an accurate head count is virtually impossible. During the period of my stay among them, the Indians, in a state of alarm over rumors that their young men were all to be conscripted for labor in the rubber forests, were understandably nervous about censuses and genealogical explorations so that my own efforts at counting were severely handicapped.

The term "Cubeo" is a Europeanization of the Tucanoan word ***kebéwa***, that means, literally, "the people that are not." It is a jest name applied to them by some other Tucanoan-speaking tribe. Most Indians were not aware that they were called "Cubeos," while those who understood what it meant did not like the name. Strictly speaking, there is no tribal name. A man will always identify himself by his sib name, never by phratry and never by tribe. In the course of discussions with the ethnologist on native conceptions of "tribe" the Indians offered some self-designations. The most common was ***pamíwa*** (first people). They also offered ***pwãnwa*** (people), and then referred to other tribes as ***apépwãnwa*** (other people). I doubt, however, that any Cubeo Indian has ever spontaneously declared himself to be a

[2] There is a list of these communities at the end of this chapter.

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pamiwa or a *pudnwa*. The group of exogamous sibs that form a phratry are spoken of as *kwindwū*, *inhiwū*, or *kwindnokauwū*, all terms with the general meaning of "one kinfolk" or "the same kinfolk." However, I have also heard the expression *nuhénokauwū* (my own kinfolk) used to refer to both tribe and phratry.

If tribal designation is vague, the native concept of tribe is only a little more definite. Tribe refers more or less to a common identity of language, descent, and custom. One of the Cubeo phratries was, in fact, once Arawakan. To become tribesmen they adopted the language, customs, and traditions of the Cubeo. Other sibs appear to have been at one time Macú as well as sections of the Tucano "tribe." There are no formal bonds of tribe and there is no acknowledgment of tribal overlordship. Cubeo social structure is segmentary, the patrilineal sib being the basic segment. Every sib has established relationships with other sibs to regulate marriage, ceremonial participation, friendships, and hospitality along traditional lines, but also to some degree along lines that suit its own particular interests.

The phratry is a more sharply defined and a far more important social aggregate than tribe. A phratry is a confederation of sibs that are closely bound by rules of exogamy, by common residence along the same river, by a tradition of common origin and descent, by a graded order of rank that assigns to each sib its place in a social hierarchy, and, finally, by a series of ceremonies, solemn as well as secular, such as drinking parties at which each sib entertains its fellow sibs. Withal, there is no phratric overlordship, no phratric council or other agency to consider policy for the phratry as a whole.

What gives a phratry cohesiveness is the pattern of relations that the individual sibs, each acting individually, have formed with one another. The most important of these relationships is the rule of exogamy. By adhering to a rule of exogamy the sibs regard themselves as "brothers," for fraternity is based on the kinship principle that brothers cooperate and share the same rules of exogamy. Most sibs in a phratry have been joined together from the traditional beginnings or the time of first emergence, others are newcomers who have been adopted into the cofraternity of sibs. Adoption is the prerogative of an individual sib. A sib adopts an alien group as a subsib and automatically gives it a place and rank in the phratry. The phratry is no homogeneous federation of fraternal sibs. It is differentiated by rank, by historic background, and by geography. Sibs of the same historic background and of similar rank who are neighbors on the river feel closer to one another and form, therefore, an unofficial but still evident inner circle. Normally, rank, historic background, and propin-

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formed by fusion or are aliens who have been adopted by a "parent" sib.

A sib is formed of patrilineal lineages that go back no more than three or four generations. Since a sib itself is small, a lineage is of minor importance. The most significant component units of a sib are the fraternal joint families and the nuclear households. A group of brothers of the same father are held together by very firm ties of common upbringing and regard themselves as very close to one another. The households of this fraternal group are distinguishable, not jurally but *de facto*, as separate entities within the sib. When a sib splits, it is the fraternal group that offers the most ready line of cleavage. Finally, there is the nuclear household, a most important unit that occupies its own "compartment" in the maloca, maintains its own hearth, and is capable also of asserting its autonomy. A nuclear household may break from the common residence group of the maloca and establish itself as an Independent, but that is about as far from the sib as it can go. It is not a truly self-sustaining unit. When it does break away, the separation is a consequence of serious disaffection, from the Cubeo point of view, an example of social pathology. Detached nuclear households often become vagrants, imposing upon the hospitality of related sibs.

What I have presented is an outline of Cubeo social organization that encompasses a descending order of subordinate and component segments, from tribe to nuclear household. There is another social concept that falls somewhat outside of this structure. That is the concept of community. The community is the common residence group, based, to be sure, upon the sib, but not exclusively so. Common residence creates its own norms of behavior.

THE COMMUNITY

The concept of community offers perhaps the most advantageous entry into the character of Cubeo social structure; it exemplifies almost all social relationships and relates them to the physical factors of location, economy, and material culture.

From the air, a community appears as a small semicircular island pressed against a thread of river in an otherwise unbroken expanse of tropical forest. The air view emphasizes the isolation and self-containment of each community. Along a well-populated river such as the Cuduiarí the communities resemble rough-shaped beads widely spaced along the thin strand of the sinuously curving river. The river literally binds the communities since, in the main, communities

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calabash dishes that had only just been acquired from the Karapana Indians was traded to the Desanas for a tray. The Cubeo seem to prefer the trade article to the domestic product. Finally, it should be said of intertribal trade that much of it follows the lines of intermarriages, in which objects are transferred in the course of normal affinal exchanges.

Within the tribe, objects tend to be exchanged largely in accordance with principles of kinship and blood brotherhood. However, as sibmen visit along the river they learn which objects and whose skills one may properly admire. The object is asked for, or in a sense contracted for, and a genial nonhaggling discussion settles the terms of the exchange. Apart from farinha, a special case, food rarely enters the channels of native trade. Koch-Grünberg's information that upriver people acquired manioc from the downriver *Hehénewa* does suggest trade in food. He gives no details, however (1909, II, 82). I never observed or heard of native trade in food, other than casual and small-scale exchange of secondary crops. Maize, for example, is a trade item, but then it is hardly a foodstuff on the Cuduiarí.

PROPERTY

With respect to land it is dominion rather than ownership that we deal with. A tribe has dominion over a territory, a phratry over a river or over sections of a river, and a sib over a smaller segment of river frontage. Dominion is sanctioned by traditions of origin which narrate precisely where the first ancestors came from, and their subsequent travels and settlements. On the strength of these traditions people can say, "This is our land." A group that has been displaced from a traditional territory may adapt its traditions to new conditions, giving itself a new origin myth. But as long as the traditions hold, the claim to dominion over the territory is not surrendered. Place names are part of the traditional claim to a territory. They identify ancestral sites, and, more particularly, fishing sites, old orchards, and manioc plantations.

Since there is no tribal or phratric administrative organization, concepts of tribal or of phratric dominion are matters of general sentiment rather than of concrete claims. Only a sib is truly concerned with its territorial integrity. There is little cause for a sib to fear encroachment on its territory. There have been instances of one sib taking over the territory of another, but these instances, as the Cubeo interpret them, were of hostility against the people, not of desire for their land. I found no evidence of land hunger among the Cubeo.

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121 571 not be accepted only as a statement of uniqueness, although the scientific value of a unique configuration is undeniable. Each general cultural pattern may ultimately be unique, but since uniqueness is a relative concept the possibility of some more general typology is a real one. Thus the hypothetical statement of a Cubeo over-all pattern should have more than specific applicability.

571 593 What kind of model, then, does Cubeo culture follow? Socially the root model is that of the solidarity of brothers. It is around this root concept that the characteristic principles of Cubeo kinship and sib and phratric organization develop. The solidarity-of-brothers concept is, as we have seen, both set off from and bound to all other relations by the universal human doctrine of order: polarity-[428] complementarity. Since primogeniture, though recognized, is minor, the male sibling solidarity is in effect nonhierarchical; it is basically lateral. And it is this fraternal model, we might say, that gives the 571 strong egalitarian cast to Cubeo society. The ancestral cult, in all its 593 aspects, is the particular Cubeo phrasing of the sacred character of 769 male sibling solidarity. It is not a worship of the past, nor does it 614 single out for special distinction any particular ancestral line except 615 from the standpoint of the phratry. But the phratry, having mainly a ritual rather than a corporate character, has only a limited effect upon the patterning of Cubeo life. The ancestral tradition does differentiate the sibs. The ancestral cult, on the other hand, serves rather to promote the lateral solidarity of the male siblings who are the roots of the sib.

571 593 61 The significance of the social pattern based upon the solidarity of the male siblings has been noted by Radcliffe-Brown as characteristic of primitive societies organized in patrilineal lineages. It is indeed a fundamental and elementary social pattern subject to a wide range of variations. In the case of the Cubeo, their entire elaboration of kinship, lineage, sib, and phratry follows very closely the lines of the elementary pattern. If the close approximation of a social structure to an elementary basic pattern may be taken as a mark of simplicity, then on this score Cubeo social structure may be characterized as "simple." It is understood, of course, that male sibling solidarity is only the focal point of a larger social pattern that includes the polarity-complementarity relationships of affinity-consanguinity, and the male-female as well as the near-distant relationship.

571 152 181 If Cubeo social structure can be derived from an elementary model, so can its emotional structure, or ethos. The Cubeo ethos seems to be based upon the doctrine of harmonizing each particular mode of emotional expression with an appropriate social activity. Stated

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what it was yesterday. Moreover, the concept of homeostasis, like that of pattern, is a theory of society. As a theory it rests upon further theoretical assumptions as to what are the significant relationships, what are the normal patterns, and what are the disharmonious and stressful interactions. In the final analysis, a theory of homeostasis deals primarily with the ways in which a society handles conflicts and stresses. From a broad perspective, one can say that Cubeo society depends rather heavily upon what might be called "mood management" for equilibrium. Its homeostasis rests a good deal less upon networks of reciprocal obligations and upon formal exchanges of goods than, let us say, in Melanesian societies. The clearest illustration of this Cubeo equilibrium principle is in the role of the headman. In Cubeo culture he is not an economic redistributor (the drinking parties cannot be regarded as an economic exchange) but a regulator of community sentiment and of good feeling. However, the nature of Cubeo equilibrium is best considered at each particular level of social integration.

Cubeo society may be presented diagrammatically as encompassing five orbits of relationship, arranged in order of progressively weaker bonds of unity. The innermost orbit is represented by the male siblings, the nucleus of the sib; the second orbit is the sib itself; the third orbit is the phratry; the fourth, the affinal kin; and the fifth and outermost, the tribe. The brother-sister relationships and the husband-wife relationships may be regarded as within the confines of the first and second orbits.

Each orbit has its own characteristics of equilibrium. To take them in reverse order: Tribal unity is so tenuous that fragmentation into subtribal units is of little consequence. New combinations are readily formed and whatever disturbance this may cause is very temporary. Tribal continuity rests upon tradition and common language and customs, on the one hand, and upon the phratric organization, of which it is a summation, on the other. With respect to tribe, the question of equilibrium is more pertinently not what holds the tribe together, but rather what there is to disperse it. Tradition and common customs and language are little more than bonds of inertia. Once set, they hold unless some stronger force intervenes. Against what counterforces are the relatively weak bonds of tradition to contend? The answer is that there are no such counterforces arising from within the society, since tribal unity has no tasks to accomplish that could involve stresses and strains. Paradoxically, the very absence of a tribal leadership is a source of unity. By virtue of the linkage-

101 a dominant influence in the area. The Tukano tribal language serves as the lingua franca of [191] the entire area. (Its use as a lingua franca antedates the appearance of other linguae francae in the region.)

The various tribes making up this large, homogeneous cultural group contain about 90 percent of the people in the area. The remainder consists of two ethnic groups. One is the Makú Indians, who live away from the rivers and are more or less nomadic. They do not intermarry with the riverine Indians. The other consists of the non-Indians, who call themselves *blancos* (in Spanish) or *brancos* (in Portuguese), and who number perhaps 1,500. Most of them live in the two or three air-strip towns. Their economy is centered around rubber gathering, and they include about 150 missionaries, who maintain some dozen missionary posts. The non-Indians have a strong monolingual tradition, speaking only either Spanish or Portuguese. They have shown little inclination to learn the Indian languages or to participate in Indian culture.[2] There is little intermarriage between Indians and *blancos* (who mostly consist of *mestizo-criollos*).

184 Here, then, is a large, culturally homoge-
191 neous area where multilingualism—and polylingualism in the individual—is the cultural norm. Anthropologically, this is a culture trait, and it is an outstanding culture trait of the area.

Social Units

• 61 Social units of primary importance to the analysis of multilingualism in the central Northwest Amazon culture area are the nuclear family, lineage, sib, tribe, phratry; the longhouse group; the linguistic group; and the [797] exogamy group. Secondarily important, as they represent aggregations from among the above, are the mission village, the rubber-working group (an incipient *patrón-peón* group), and the nationality group. In the structural interrelations of all these groups, the sib occupies a focal position.

Several nuclear families may be found in a lineage, and several lineages in a sib (or patrilineal clan), which is the named and localized unit of social organization. A tribe is a named political and ceremonial unit, consisting of several sibs; it has a separate history and is identifiable by a distinct language. Barring the few exceptions where some of its sibs belong to a different phratry from that of the major-

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61 ity, each tribe is aligned with one of five phratries. Each phratry is a named, exogamous group of sibs that marries into the other phratries in the area. A phratry is not a political or ceremonial unit per se.

592 The basic political and ceremonial unit of
-61 the Northwest Amazon is the longhouse
594 group, which is also the basic unit of economic redistribution. (The nuclear family is the basic economic unit *before* redistribution.) A new longhouse unit is often created by several classificatory brothers, not necessarily from the same parent longhouse. The one among them who is felt to have the best leadership qualifications becomes chief of the new longhouse group. Sometimes, also, a growing lineage group establishes a new longhouse, with its patriarch as chief. (Each nuclear family has its own area in the longhouse, and each married woman has her own hearth in this area; her husband smokes his fish and game on a rack lowered from the rafters above her hearth. All men and boys are served at one time at the center front of the longhouse by the women, who bring what they have individually prepared at their hearths, including some of their husbands' fish and game, and lay it out for all the men to share. After the men have eaten, the women and girls eat. Then each woman reclaims her own prepared food and what is left of her husband's catch.) A well-established longhouse group becomes, over a period of time, a cluster of lineages. A tribe is represented by a series of longhouses, located several hours' paddling distance apart from each other along a river and often situated at rapids for good fishing.

[251] [354] [264] [562] 61

619 The tribe is co-extensive with the linguistic
197 group, which is composed of those individuals who are expected to have used the language as their principal language when they were children in their nuclear family of orientation. The language that identifies the linguistic group is, then, at once the father tongue, the longhouse language, and the tribal language of each member; it is *not* the language that identifies the mother's linguistic group.

61 The exogamic group is the phratry. Cul-
582 tural emphasis is more on nonendogamy within the phratry than on prescribed exogamic alliances among the phratries (although suggestions of such may be found among some of the tribes). Informants, however, claim that the unit of exogamy is the tribe. The few exceptional cases of tribes whose sibs belong

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Wagley, Harvey Pitkin, Robert F. Murphy, and Dell Hymes. I am indebted to them for their criticisms and encouragement.

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[3] Notable exceptions have been Father Kók of the Montfortiano Order, who was in the Colombian Vaupés until the late 1940's and wrote a grammar (1921-22), and Father Giacone of the Salesian Order, in Brasil, who has just published a grammar (1965, not yet seen by this writer; also 1939). Many missionaries can understand an Indian language to some extent and listen to confessions in it.

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[4] According to informants from the still-Indian Middle and Upper Vaupés area, the area of this paper, it seems likely that the *caboclo* population of the Lower Vaupés River and adjacent areas along the Rio Negro continues to observe some sort of exogamy. Caboclos are detribalized (deculturated) Indians who, through the processes of loss, acquisition, and intermingling of Indian and European (Portuguese) culture traits, have acculturated to a relatively stable but impoverished type of "backwoods," riverine culture. Caboclo culture depends on the extraction of natural products, such as rubber, accompanied by some subsistence farming, fishing, and hunting. The caboclo population functions as a marginal, and usually indebted, rural peasantry in the national economy (Wagley 1953, 1964; Oberg 1963). Much of the population living along the Amazon and its tributaries consists of caboclos. The caboclo population is mostly of the Indian physical type, but it may include some non-Indian admixture. The term "*caboclo*" is Portuguese; in Vaupense Spanish it is "*cabuco*," and in Tukano it is a form glossing as "mixed one." Some downriver segments of such Indian groups as the Tukano and the Desano, and particularly the Barí, are now considered by the other Indians as well as by the non-Indians to be caboclos.

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[5] The identification of "tribe" with patrilocal language groups and, consequently, with a "linguistically and culturally hybrid social unit," suggests a possibility for widening the research problem recently described by Owen (1965). See Naroll (1964), also, on types of cultural units.

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[6] These statements are based on 167 formally recorded interviews taken along the course of the Papurí and some of its tributaries, such as the Inambú and the Pira, and on the upper- to middle-Tikié. However, the representation by tribe, river, age group, mission, etc., is not comprehensive enough for a statistically controlled comparison. Many informants' statements were checked and double-checked, and some were cross-checked through other informants or at other times; they were found to be constant. Most interviewing was done in Tukano. Informants consistently tended to underestimate their linguistic repertoire, and these underestimates, as given, have been retained in the field notebook. I observed that, perhaps owing to the census-like nature of this activity, informants registered some uneasiness, although they did not cease to maintain rapport with the field worker, so the program was dropped and only occasional interviews thereafter were recorded. (In the following year a governmental census was indeed taken.) At one mission, I secured accurate data *about* each informant's linguistic repertoire, but the informants gave spurious names (each other's names in many cases) as a maneuver not aimed against the researcher but intended as a kind of practice session in preparation for coping with a locally renewed politico-religious threat based on missionary rivalry.

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[7] There still exist abrupt cultural and linguistic lines of demarcation between Tukano and Spanish, which are separated from each other either by a geographical no-man's-land or by figuratively walled towns; but there is now a tendency to adapt to a caboclo type of culture on a semipermanent basis by some Indian nuclear families in the rubber-gathering Upper Vaupés-Upper Apaporis area. They represent a stage of acculturation similar to the one described by Steward and Murphy (1956) for the Mundurucú. Indeed, there are a number of parallels with the Mundurucú (Murphy 1960).

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